

THE CALL OF YULETIDE



A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS BY ST. JOESPH'S WRITING COLLECTIVE

EM

Writing Credits

Cap'n Caroler
Marie Starsmith
Aurea Rosa



Art Credits

HMS

Aurea Rosa

Cap'n Kringle

And Various Royalty-Free Image Websites



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Treasure Tree

Tinsel gleams
Colored lights glow
Pine needle shadows
Hide the treasures below

Treasures in
Wrapping paper
Once torn open by
A naughty kid's caper

Peaceful house
Christmas Eve night
Joy comes tomorrow
With dawn's glorious light



By Aurea Rosa

Miss Midwinter

Marie Starsmith

Hear ye! cry the southbound geese,
Here she comes! they proclaim.

Hurry! chitters the gray squirrel,
Pack and pack! Be not vain!

Let pride not be the end of you!
All the woodland creatures say.

Here she is... states the oak trees,
As they fall asleep again.

How has a year gone by?
It was now and now it's *then*.

And in the midst of forest frivolity,
There was a silence in the din.

Muffled, quiet, walking footsteps.
Frosty mittens trimmed with ice...

Bluest eyes and whitest hair,
Skin scented with holly spice...

Silence fell upon the woods, then,
From the bear and to the mice.

Miss Midwinter, fairest Lady,
Wearing Demeter's shawl,

With boots of finest fur, she strides,
And cleans up after Fall.

She sweeps away the leaves' dim hues,
Casting white snow over all.

And as she comes, the North wind rises,
To aid his old friend yet again,

By hurrying home all the creatures,
So she won't... clean up *them*.

The Considerably Contentious Christmas Carol Crusade

“Deeeck the halls with boughs of holly...”

The familiar tune drifted over the aisles of Ollie’s Bargain outlet, as Francis poked through the stacks of leftover Halloween candy. Without noticing what she was doing, she found herself humming along.

Her eyes widened. “Wait a minute. It’s November 2. No one should be decking halls on November 2!”

“Oh, don’t be a Scrooge!” came the reply from a large red-headed woman across the aisle. “I’ve been playing Christmas music since September!”

“Blasphemy! Christmas music before December is an affront to God!” shouted a gray-bearded man who had been rummaging through the irregular sock bin.

“Quite right,” came a noise from a knit-capped man in the pet aisle. “It’s unamerican and tacky!”

“Ginches, the lot of you! Where’s your holiday spirit?” offered the young employee tagging dog treats.

“It’s childish!”

“Gaudy!”

“Vulgar!”

The capped man and the bearded man shook hands and crossed their arms, glaring at the heathens in their midst.

An announcement came from the loudspeakers above: “Will the troglodytes in Aisle Five please stop their bickering and let our customers shop in peace?”

“Who are you callin’ troglodyte, lady?” came a shout from the checkout. “They’re right! What happened to Thanksgiving?”

“Thanksgiving is for losers!”

“Who’s a loser?”

“Scrooge!”

“Killjoy!”

“Delinquent!”

And so it went. Before long, they were lined up on opposite sides of the carpet aisle, brandishing makeshift weaponry made from cheap toys and sporting goods. On the left, Francis stood at the lead, boldly pointing a plastic hockey stick in the air.

“For Christmas!”

The crowd behind her roared. On the right, the knit-cap man held a knock-off lightsaber out triumphantly.

“For tradition!”

“AHHH!”

“AAAAHH!”

The two factions lunged and met in a fracas, knocking over the rug piles and exercise displays. Outdated macaroni and off-brand Pop-Tarts flew to the raptors. Francis took a 2021 Guinness World Records book to the back of the head, and the cashier was beamed by a decorative wall clock.

“HO HO HOOOLD IT!!” came a bellow from the sliding doors. “What’s going on here?!”

Everyone froze. The red-headed woman peeked out from the now-headless Ollie mascot bobblehead.

“Santa?”

The gray-bearded man struggled to pull off Ollie’s head, which had been violently affixed to his own.

“What’s going on out there?” he muffled.

“I got here as soon as I could,” interrupted Santa. “One of my scout elves alerted me to a Christmas anomaly down here in the states. Now what’s all this silliness about?”

“These bigots don’t believe in Christmas music!”

“That’s not true!” yelled Francis. “We respect it! You don’t!”

“Santa,” mumbled Ollie’s bobbling head, “you can settle this for us. When is it appropriate to start playing Christmas music?”

“Oh Ho Ho Ho! Is that all this is about? Why, it’s very simple! Christmas music shouldn’t be played until Christmas Eve! That’s when the holiday season starts, after all.”

The shoppers' mouths dropped open in unison.

“Ho Ho! Anything else would be heretical! Obviously! What, do you want to cheapen Christmas down to nothing? Ho Ho Ho! Well, I’m glad I was able to clear that up for you all. Merry Christmas!” And with a snap of his fingers and turn of his head, he was whisked out the doors and into his waiting sled.

About 20 seconds later, as Santa’s jingling bells drifted off, Francis broke the silence: “What a load of baloney. I guess Christmas music whenever is fine.”

“Yeah, Santa’s dumb,” agreed the knit-capped man. “Well, I guess we better all help clean up this mess. Someone put on some music to clean by”

“On it!” said the cashier, as the shoppers cooperated to pop Ollie’s head back into place.

“IIIII’m dreeeaming, of a whiiiite Christmass...”



By Cap’n Caroler

Christmas Mouse

It's fun to be a mouse on Christmas Eve. Don't get me wrong—there are still dangers about: the vacuum, the insomniac, and the precariously balanced Christmas tree. But the food. Oh, the food. Glorious mountains of nose-twitching, mouth-watering—

Ahem. Sorry, I get carried away sometimes. My name's Snowbelle, and I am a mouse. Most of the year, I live in a cozy little mousehole behind the couch. My human house has everything I could want, from peanuts to popcorn. The only food I can't reach is whatever's in the refrigerator and the candy in the top cupboard. That's where Christmas Eve comes in.

Peeking out of my mousehole, I locate the candy basket on the counter. The humans always leave it out on Christmas Eve, never minding when several pieces mysteriously disappear. *It's a good thing they don't notice*, I think, savoring the warm scent of chocolate.

My whiskers twitch, testing the cool air. All clear. Scurrying under the couch, I pause. There's a rumbling underneath me and a whoosh of air from the vent. *The heater*, I think, irritated. *Great. Now I can't hear anything.*

As I run, my paws tap the cold floor, forming a quiet, urgent rhythm: *Hurry mouse, hurry mouse, hurry mou—* I stop. My eyes dart around the dark kitchen. Seeing it empty, I dart to the base of the cabinets. *One jump*, I think, crouching. My strength coils in my legs, infusing them with restless power.

Kicking the floor in a calculated leap, I fly. Air streams past me like water. Stretching out my forelegs, I grip the edge of the counter, then scramble up and onto the slick surface. Before me looms the great, bountiful basket. Scaling the loose weave, I dive into the pile of sweets. The overwhelming scent of candy fills my nose, and a shiver of anticipation runs through me.

Seizing the nearest candy, I carefully claw back the foil. Solid chocolate. I almost take a bite, but my memories scream a warning: *Don't you remember the last time you ate too much chocolate? Don't you remember how your stomach hurt?* Reluctantly tossing it aside, I search for a better prize.

At last, I discover a familiar orange wrapper. *A little bit of chocolate and a lot of peanut butter*, I think happily. Peeling back the wrapper, I open my mouth.

Suddenly, the basket is plunged into shadow. Looking up, I see a human looming over me. *The insomniac!* I leap out of the basket, still clutching my candy. My heart races, and my thoughts come in panicked bursts. *Run! Stop! Look! Run! Faster! Leap!*

The force of my desperate jump carries me into the spiky branches of the Christmas tree. Trying not to skewer my paws on the needles, I navigate to the branch closest to my home. It's still a risky distance, and the human is lumbering nearer. *Do something*, my mind screams, but I don't have any ideas. *Any nearer and the insomniac will knock the tree over!*

Bursting out of the tree, I make a mad dash for my mousehole. Clutching the candy hampers my journey, but I refuse to let go. *Faster!* The human is right behind me. Squeezing my eyes shut, I make one last, desperate bound.

I land awkwardly, collapsing in a heap on a rough surface. Opening my eyes, I find myself just inside my mousehole. Outside, the human bends to peek inside my doorway, then trudges away. Pulling myself to my paws, I let relief wash the fear away.

Is candy really worth the risk? I wonder, looking down at my prize. Nibbling at the exposed peanut butter, I blink contentedly.

Absolutely.



By Aurea Rosa

Tranquil Eve

Covering the ground with nary a sound,
Hovering, sparkling whiteness abounds.
Rustling leaves, now silenced beneath,
Icicles hanging from luminous wreaths.
Snow covered hills bring a feeling of hush.
Taking a break from the holiday rush,
Making the trip to the spot in the wood
At which our old Christmas tree solemnly stood,
Symbols remind me of holiday joy.

Embracing tinsel and mountains of toys,
Venerable sentinel, guardian of gifts,
Escaped from the tranquil and frigid snowdrifts.

By Cap'n Caroler

Snowy Hill Concrete Poem

Stand
on top
of the
hill,
sled
in hand.

Look down
at the snow
covering the
valley below.

Feel the wind
swirl around you, freezing your rosy face.

Climb into your sled; let it carry you

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By Aurea Rosa

Caramels for Santa

Throwing her bag onto the entryway bench, Beth called, “Nana, I’m home!” Yanking off her snow-caked boots, she set them on the shoe rack.

“Oh, Beth,” Nana’s voice said from the kitchen, “You’re just in time. I’m making caramels!”

“Can I help?” Beth asked, wrestling her winter coat onto the hook.

“Absolutely.”

“Great!” Digging a hair tie out of her bag, Beth pulled her curly blonde hair into a ponytail. Stepping into the kitchen, she glanced at the ingredients on the counter: butter, sugar, cream, vanilla, and corn syrup. “That’s a lot of sugar.”

“To the best of my knowledge, Santa’s not on a diet,” Nana said with a smile, setting a large pot on the stove. “Two sticks of butter, please.”

Dropping the wrappers in the trash, Beth handed the butter to her grandmother. “I’m thirteen now, Nana,” Beth said, “You don’t have to keep pretending that Santa’s real.”

“I’m not pretending,” Nana insisted, “I saw him when I was your age. Could you measure the sugar? We need four cups.”

“You’re kidding, right? About Santa?” Grabbing a measuring cup from the cupboard, Beth dumped four cupfuls into the pot.

Pouring corn syrup and vanilla on top of the sugar mound, Nana hummed an old ditty. When the last drop had fallen she responded, “No, I really saw him.”

Beth said nothing. She usually believed her grandmother’s word, but this was beyond what could possibly be true.

“Do you want to stir?” Nana said, holding out a oven glove and a long wooden spoon.

“Sure!” Slipping on the glove, Beth wrapped it awkwardly around the spoon handle. With each slow circle of the utensil, the ingredients formed a more thoroughly mixed combination.

“Be careful not to burn yourself, Beth. It gets very hot indeed.”

“Okay.”

Carefully watching Beth stir, Nana began, “My family used to make caramels every Christmas. Not for Santa, but as gifts for our extended family and friends. Mysteriously, one parcel of candies would disappear every Christmas Eve.

“I was convinced that my younger brother was behind the missing caramels. So I decided to investigate. One Christmas Eve, I hid in the closet beneath the stairs and watched through the keyhole. It was very dark, except for the multi-colored glow of the tree’s lights. I nearly fell asleep. When I had almost dozed off, I heard a faint jingling. I jolted awake. Sudden—”

It was just then that the mixture decided to start boiling. Grabbing the cream, Nana slowly poured two cupfuls into the pot. “There. Keep stirring! Now, where was I?”

“Suddenly,” said Beth.

“Ah, yes. Suddenly, a very small, bearded man in a red suit slid down the chimney. Dusting the soot off his boots, he flicked the white pompom on his hat. There was a quiet popping sound, and he grew to become a normal-sized Santa Claus. Sweeping off his hat, he made an assortment of presents appear below the Christmas tree.

“Then, stepping over to the table beside the Christmas tree, he selected a parcel of caramels. Tucking it in his hat, he made it disappear. He turned toward the closet I was hiding in and whispered, ‘Thank you for making those caramels for me. They’re delicious!’ A broad smile spread across his face.

“‘You’re welcome,’ I whispered. Then, returning his hat to his head, Santa vanished.”

Filling a cup with cold water, Nana held it up. “Could you drop some caramel in here?” Beth obliged. Dipping her fingers in the water, Beth’s grandmother felt the ball of caramel. “Perfect! You can stop stirring now.” Turning off the heat, Nana warned, “Watch out, it’s hot!”

Pouring the caramel into a greased pan, Nana finished, “Well, after I saw him, I had no choice but to believe he existed. I told my family about it, but I don’t think they ever fully did. They did let me make extra caramels for Santa, though. Santa’s parcel always disappeared on Christmas Eve, even after we moved. In fact, they still do. Perhaps if you hide in my closet, you’ll see him too.”

“You really think so?” Beth asked.

“I really do.”



By Aurea Rosa

SNOWY Content

Down come the cold snowflakes so small and white,
So many, so pretty, so burning bright!
Catch them, catch them, if you can and dare;
They will dodge you with nary a care!

On your dark eyelashes they will all cloud,
Soon to make a glittering, crystal crowd,
To make you laugh and to make you smile...

...and to make shoveling them worthwhile.



By: Marie Starsmith

The Winter Sentinel

A cold world I see:
All ice, snow, and slush.
Not a sound is made
That's not a soft hush.

Muffled and muted,
The wind whispers by,
Barely breathing through
The snow-laden sky.

So, without a breath,
All alone, I pose,
With two, coal-black eyes,
And a carrot nose.

By: Marie Starsmith

Be sure to check out



our next edition!

Caramel Recipe

Based off of Maurine Lane's recipe

Tested and edited by TJF

4 cups sugar

2 cups cream

3 ½ cups Karo light corn syrup

2 sticks butter

2 (extra) cups cream

2 teaspoon vanilla

1. Mix the sugar, first cream, Karo syrup, and butter together.
2. Boil in a pot, stirring continuously. (Takes a while.)
3. Add the extra cream slowly. (Do not let the boiling or stirring stop.)
4. The caramel should darken in color. Periodically test the caramel in cold water. If it is firm and pliable, remove it from heat.
5. Add the vanilla.
6. Pour into a greased cookie sheet with 1 inch sides.
7. Let cool for 24 hours.
8. Cut into pieces and wrap in candy wrappers or wax paper if desired.
9. Enjoy!

Snow, frost, and holly
Freezing gales and snowstorm wrath
Winter cold and bright

Come inside with me
Sit by the blazing fire
Come and tell a tale

Peek inside for a collection of prose and poetry celebrating the wonders of early winter and the holiday season. Savor a stolen candy with a mouse, sweep away Fall with Miss Midwinter, and make caramels with a grandma who once saw Santa Claus. Bonus recipe included!